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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa officially launched by Secretary-General.

* Security Council meets on situation in Somalia.

* Solidarity is critical in combatting poverty, Commission on Status of Women is told.

* UNHCR closes office in Santiago, Chile,

* High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina expresses concern over the political will of Bosnian parties to comply with Dayton Peace Agreements.

* In Angola, Special Representative opens two more quartering sites.

* State of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the world will be focus as Commission on Human Rights begins 52nd session in Geneva Monday.

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The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa was officially launched today by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali at a ceremony at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Speaking via live satellite hookup from Geneva, he said this initiative was first and foremost an appeal to the global community to join in an effort intended to benefit many millions of people in Africa.

The Secretary-General said the initiative is a message to Africa that it is not alone and has not been abandoned by the international community. For several years, Africa despite its serious and persistent difficulties has fought courageously for peace, development, democracy and for respect of human rights. More than ever, Dr. Boutros-Ghali said he believed in the ability of the men and women in Africa to act.

The unprecedented Special Initiative is described as a $25 billion programme of concrete actions to accelerate African development. It aims over a 10-year period, to greatly expand basic education and health care, promote peace and better governance, and improve water and food security. It also involves a year-long mobilization of political commitment and support for Africa.

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The Security Council met today in an open meeting on the situation in Somalia. In a statement on behalf of the European Union, the Deputy permanent Representative of Italy Ambassador Lorenzo Ferrarin said Somalia was today a country without a semblance of central authority. It was the people and leaders of Somalia who bear the ultimate responsibility for national reconciliation and restoring peace, he said. The situation seemed particularly critical in the capital, where the increase in criminal activity was compounded by the continued closure of the port and airport, leading to a blockade of commercial activity. The situation was hardly reassuring, and security conditions are getting worse. There were signs of a possible extension of armed bands' activity and of widescale renewal of fighting. Ambassador Ferrarin said the European Union was deeply concerned by the spiral of seemingly endless violence gripping Somalia.

The representative of the United States Ambassador Madeleine Albright said that while economic activity was moving forward in Somalia, this private economic activity did little to support social services. She added that the United States had joined in efforts of the United Nations in addressing the humanitarian, social and economic concerns of the people of Somalia.

She said while her country did not recognize or support any Somali group or faction, it remained in communication with all the political groups of the country. The US and the international aid community were closely monitoring the food situation in order to prevent another famine. She called upon the factions in Somalia to re-open the port and insure that it remained open so that assistance may be delivered.

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The Commission on the Status of Women has been told that solidarity is critical in combatting poverty. Speakers pointed to solidarity between North and South, governments and civil society, rich and poor, and men and women as the Commission conducted a dialogue among governments on poverty, as part of its follow-up to the Platform for Action adopted at the Beijing Conference on Women.

The representative of the Republic of Korea stressed that international financial organizations must cooperate with developing countries in order to address poverty in the least developed countries. The envoy from Chile said the struggle against poverty is not a matter to be dealt with by governments alone, rather all of mankind must participate.

Speaking on behalf of the European Union, Italian representative said that in some developed countries, poverty, especially among women, is linked to labor shortages. He said the European Union is working to address the problem of unemployment based on equal opportunities for men and women. He cautioned that the eradication of poverty is central to the functioning of genuine democracy, since poverty prevented people from exercising their rights.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has closed its office in Santiago, Chile, after 22 years of service to refugees and returnees in Chile, according to a UNHCR statement.

The office began work in 1973, a week after the overthrow of the government of Salvador Allende. During 1973 and 1974, UNHCR Santiago managed to find resettlement for over 2,000 foreign refugees who were among the first to suffer the consequences of repression. Simultaneously, UNHCR offices in neighboring countries had to cope with the influx of thousands of Chileans escaping military repression.

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The High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina has expressed concern over the political will of the Bosnian parties to comply with the Dayton Peace Agreements. The charge is contained in the first report by High Representative Carl Bildt to the Security Council in accordance with the peace agreement, according to a UN Spokesman. The report which covers the period from the signing of the agreement last December to the beginning of March this year, indicates that the separation of forces has been carried out successfully with the help of the Implementation Force (IFOR).

However, Mr. Bildt said in the report that political developments surrounding the transfer of territory has been troubling. Three months after the peace agreement was signed, the forces of ethnic separation are still far stronger than the forces of ethnic reintegration. The spokesman said Mr. Bildt was very worried about the lack of adequate funding for various civilian implementation efforts and was concerned about the political will of the parties concerned to fully comply.

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In Angola, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Blandon Beye has opened two more quartering sites. According to a UN Radio report from Luanda, there are very few soldiers from the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), being quartered this week. The slowdown is due to the fact that UNITA is this week celebrating its 30th anniversary. So far only just over 17-thousand UNITA soldiers have been quartered.

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The state of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the world will be the focus of the Commission on Human Rights when it opens its fifty-second session in Geneva Monday. The provisional agenda for the session deals with questions such as human rights violations in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine, and on the Papua New Guinea island of Bouganville. There are also items on the human rights situation in Cuba, southern Lebanon and Western Bekaa, Iran, Zaire, Equatorial Guinea, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, the territory of the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and East Timor.

The Commission will look at the realization in all countries of economic, social and cultural rights, of the right to development and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Commission's extensive mandate allows it to examine the whole spectrum of human rights, be they civil, political, economic, social or cultural.

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